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Walters, Longtime Diplomat, Gets Kirkpatrick Post at U.N.

To Hold Cabinet Rank

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 8 — Gen. Vernon A. Walters, an experienced envoy and former Central Intelligence Agency official, was nominated by President Reagan today to succeed Jeane J. Kirkpatrick as chief United States delegate to the United Nations.

After the announcement, the 68-year-old retired Army general told reporters at the State Department, "I will do my best to continue the superb work that Ambassador Kirkpatrick has done in the United Nations to restore and enhance the position of the United States."

Speaks Seven Languages

In accepting the post, General Walters made it clear that he would hold Cabinet rank, as had Dr. Kirkpatrick. In recent weeks, Administration officials have said Secretary of State George P. Shultz was seeking to remove the post from Cabinet status.

The general said, in response to a question, "My understanding is the position is the same as it was in the case of my predecessor."

Since 1961, General Walters, who speaks seven foreign languages, has served Mr. Reagan as an Ambassador at Large. He has visited about 100 countries, the State Department said, usually on secret missions.

A diplomat who shuns personal publicity, he has worked for five Administrations in the last 40 years and has been involved in missions in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Asia, South America and Central America.

He said today that he considered his appointment to be the pinnacle of his long career. "It is a great honor to have received this mark of confidence," he said.

In response to a question, he said: "I think the United Nations is necessary for the world. Otherwise, I wouldn't consider accepting this job."

Discussing Dr. Kirkpatrick, one of the most prominent conservatives in the Administration, he said: "I think she's done a fantastic job. I think the position of the United States today in the United Nations is quite different from what it was four years ago."

"If I can do half as well," he said, "I will be quite pleased."

Kirkpatrick Leaves in March

Dr. Kirkpatrick is planning to leave the United Nations post in March and return to Washington to resume her academic career. Although she had sought a high-level foreign policy job in the Administration, she apparently was not offered a post she wanted.

Although General Walters undertook many confidential journeys in recent years, he said today that "none of these missions have really been secret per se."

He added: "I've never traveled under false names or under disguise. I haven't sought any publicity. I have come to the conclusion that there's no amount of good that you can't do if you don't care who gets the credit for it. "It's sometimes frustrating because I am not a modest man," he said, remarking that his travels in the last four years have totaled about a million miles.

Was Deputy Chief of C.I.A.

The White House statement on his appointment said, "His special assignments included serving directly under Presidents Truman, Eisenhower and Nixon."

General Walters was Deputy Director of the Central Intelligence Agency under Presidents Nixon and Ford. He played a minor part in the secret diplomacy ending American involvement in Vietnam, and he also took part in ne-

gotiations leading to the renewal of United States ties to China. He was an aide to W. Averell Harriman at the Marshall Plan headquarters in Paris, and served as an assistant to President Eisenhower on his foreign trips.

The three-star general, who retired from the Army in 1976 after 35 years' service, has published memoirs, "Silent Missions," on his dealings and experiences with many world leaders.

In recent years, he went to Cuba to explore the possibility of improving relations with Fidel Castro, and in 1982 he visited Argentina to explain why the United States supported Britain in the conflict over the Falkland Islands.

Voiced Concern to D'Aubuisson

Last year his missions took him, insofar as is known, to El Salvador, Sri Lanka and several African countries. The secret mission to El Salvador was to voice concern to the rightist leader, Roberto d'Aubuisson, about rumors of an assassination attempt against the United States Ambassador, Thomas R. Pickering. The general apparently asked Mr. D'Aubuisson to use his influence to halt any such attempt.

General Walters is especially known for his linguistic skills. He speaks French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, German, Dutch and Russian.

It has been reported that he preferred to slip into a country unannounced before diplomatic discussions so he could ride buses and brush up on local slang.

He had told the White House that he would decline the United Nations post unless it held Cabinet rank, Administration officials said. The White House announcement said he, like Dr. Kirkpatrick, would serve on the National Security Council as well as hold "Cabinet rank."